



University of
Pittsburgh

College of
General Studies



University Center for
Teaching and Learning

ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT: CGS STANDARDS OF GOOD PRACTICE INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Congratulations! We are very pleased that you have been assigned to develop and teach an online course for CGS. We want to make your course development process and teaching go as smoothly as possible and to ensure that students are receiving the best possible online education experience. The following guide provides a detailed overview of the CGS online course approval and development process as well as a summary of expectations for CGS online instructors based on best practices and standards in online education.

Please read this information carefully and do not hesitate to contact us if questions arise or further assistance is needed.

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Contents

SECTION I: CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL PROCESS	5
CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL FORM	5
CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT CONTRACT	5
PAYMENT	5
FIRST OFFERING OF COURSE and DEBRIEFING	5
CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL FORM (Sample)	6
CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT CONTRACT (Sample)	9
SECTION 2: CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE AND STEPS/DELIVERABLES	12
CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE AND DELIVERABLES	13
CGS ONLINE COURSE FINAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL FORM	14
CGS ONLINE COURSE MIDPOINT REVIEW FORM	16
CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT RUBRIC	20
SECTION 3: EXPECTATIONS FOR CGS ONLINE INSTRUCTORS	28
PART I: TEACHING AT CGS - BEST PRACTICES IN ONLINE TEACHING	28
Class Preparation	28
Internal & External Student Support Resources	29
Course Design and Activities.....	29
During the Course:	30
At the End of the Course:.....	31
PART II: OUTSIDE-THE-CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS	31
Program Administration.....	31
CGS CREDIT HOUR POLICY FOR ONLINE COURSES	33
CGS SYLLABUS CHECKLIST FOR ONLINE COURSES	35
BASIC COURSE INFORMATION	35
INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION.....	35
COURSE DETAILS.....	35
COURSE STRUCTURE	35
COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING	35
POLICIES AND STATEMENTS.....	36
CGS COURSE SYLLABUS TEMPLATE	44
DEVELOPING MODULES	49

DEVELOPING AND TEACHING YOUR ONLINE COURSE 51

ONLINE DISCUSSION: STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS..... 51

 Online discussion offers several advantages to face-to-face classroom interactions: 51

 Characteristics of effective discussions: 51

 Strategies for a successful online discussion: 52

SECTION I: CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL PROCESS

CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL FORM

In order to offer an online course for the first time through CGS, each course developer completes the CGS Online Course Development Proposal form and has it signed by the respective department chair, documenting for CGS that the department knows that they approved the course instructor to develop a CGS Online version of the course. The Office of the CGS Director of Online Learning then forwards the proposal form to the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Senior Director, Dietrich School and CGS for second approval and signature, documenting that CGS wants the course developer to transition and teach a CGS Online version of the course. A copy of the signed form is forwarded to the course developer and is kept on file in CGS. In addition, each course developer is expected to meet with a CGS Instructional Designer to discuss the scope and type of training and support needed prior, during, and after the development of the CGS online course.

CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT CONTRACT

The CGS Online Development contract consists of two parts: a Memorandum and the CGS Online Policy Statement. The course developer will have to sign both; CGS will sign the memorandum.

Memorandum. This document serves as an agreement between the course developer and CGS. It identifies the course to be developed and the expectations for successful development, as well as specifying the terms under which the agreement may be cancelled. Each course developer signs and returns the original, and CGS will sign and file it, sending the course developer a copy with all signatures.

CGS Online Policy Statement. This document explains the policies regarding courses developed for CGS Online: a course developer's responsibilities, the nature of the instructional design help CGS may provide, how development approvals and payments are handled, royalties and copyrights, and the University's policy on affirmative action. Course developers sign and return the original, and CGS files it, sending a copy back.

PAYMENT

After the completed course is reviewed and approved by CGS, CGS Online Learning will notify the CGS payroll coordinator to submit payment to payment processing. It typically takes a minimum of 4-6 weeks for receipt of payment; the delay results mainly from payment processing's calendar, over which CGS has no control.

FIRST OFFERING OF COURSE and DEBRIEFING

During the first offering of the course, a CGS instructional designer will be enrolled in the course and provide ongoing support culminating in a final one-on-one meeting. Upon the completion of the course, instructors are expected to submit a final reflection report to the CGS Director of Online Learning noting successful aspects of the course as well as any changes and improvements they would like to make for the next time around. It is also assumed that the department offering the course will evaluate the course's content and effectiveness in ways that are comparable to the evaluation of face-to-face (in-class) course offerings. CGS online course offerings reflect the quality of the department, the college, the university in the same way that face-to-face courses do, and as such, online courses are expected to hold the same high standards as traditional courses. Online courses failing to meet appropriate standards may be withdrawn from the course offerings by the host department or CGS.

CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL FORM (Sample)

Prior to completing this form, the faculty course developer is expected to have read and fully understand the documents, CGS Online Standards of Good Practice and CGS Expectations for Online Faculty.

Proposal for New CGS Online Course Development

INTRODUCTION: All courses to be developed and offered through CGS Online and new sections of online courses to be taught by a different instructor than the originator must be proposed to the College of General Studies using this form.

The content of the course and the course development project must first be endorsed by the academic department in which the course exists (approval by the department chair must be indicated on page 4). CGS Online course offerings reflect the quality of the department, the college, and the university, and as such, online courses are expected to meet the same high standards as traditional courses.

- Prior to completing this form, the instructor is expected to read and fully understand the [CGS Online Instructor's Guide located on the CGS website](#).
- All instructors new to CGS Online, whether teaching or developing an online course for the first time, should plan to meet with a CGS instructional designer about their online course. At the meeting, you will discuss the type of training and support you will need prior and during teaching/developing your CGS online course.
- Course developers will be invited to participate in a faculty development cohort led by the CGS Instructional Design team.
- All courses are developed under a signed agreement and include a review for quality and accessibility according to standards and criteria established by CGS and Quality Matters.
- Online courses that fail to meet appropriate standards may be withdrawn from the course offerings by the academic department or the College of General Studies.

Any questions about completing the form and the status of your proposal should be directed to Boryana Dobрева, CGS Director of Online Learning, at boryana.dobрева@pitt.edu.

Course Number, Title, and Credit Hours: _____

Course Instructor(s): _____

Course Description from Catalog: _____

What is the modality of this course? Web (asynch) _____ Hybrid _____

If a hybrid, how many face-to-face sessions will you require? _____

What is the proposed enrollment limit for this course section? _____

(Note: Online course offerings are limited to a smaller number of students (approx. 20). Instructors seeking to increase the number of enrollments should consider the pedagogical and course management impact as well as the level of student-to-instructor interaction required and provide an

explanation of the instructional and assessment methods that they plan to use and how these methods are designed to support a greater number of students.)

When will this course initially be offered?

Term ___ Year ___

Are there any prerequisites for this course?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, please list and note whether or not they are currently available online.

Course #	Credit	Name	Available by Distance Education (Yes/No)

Instructors are reminded to familiarize themselves with the relevant copyright and fair use provisions and that they may need to secure permissions to use some materials (resources can be found on the Teaching Center and ULS websites).

Instructional Support/Training: Please indicate below the type of training/instructional support agreed upon at your meeting with your instructional designer:

Course Instructor: I have reviewed and will abide by the CGS Online Standards of Good Practice and the CGS Online Faculty Participation Guidelines, and I am committed to having the course ready for students during the semester indicated on the cover page of this application and developed at the level indicated above.

I have attached the following required supporting documents:

_____ Course syllabus and schedule

_____ Other supporting documents (please specify): _____

Comments:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please provide your best contact information:

Address:

Phone: _____

Email: _____

CGS Director of Online Learning

The proposal was reviewed for completeness prior to its submission to the academic department.

Review Name / Signature: _____ Date: _____

Comments:

ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS:

Department Chair/Program Director: I have reviewed the details of the proposed online offering of this course section (incl., syllabus course outline and any other supporting materials) and give my approval to have it developed and offered during the semester indicated on page 2 of this application. I further support the level of training required, as indicated.

Department:

Department Chair/ DUGS / Program Director: _____ (please print name)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Comments:

Senior Director, Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences and CGS: I approve of the instructor(s) developing and offering the proposed course section through CGS Online as described above. I further support the level of training required, as indicated.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Comments:

Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences and CGS: I approve of the instructor(s) developing and offering the proposed course section through CGS Online as described above. I further support the level of training required, as indicated.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Comments:

CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT CONTRACT (Sample)

Memorandum

To: [Faculty Name]
From: _____
Senior Director for Undergraduate Studies, Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences and CGS

Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences and CGS
Subject: Memorandum of Agreement, CGS Online Course Development
Date: [date]

This memorandum will serve as an agreement between the University of Pittsburgh’s College of General Studies and **[Faculty Name]** (Developer), who is developing the CGS Online course **[DEPT ##### Course Title]**.

The Developer of the course has reviewed and agrees to abide by the CGS Online Policy Statement on Instructional Materials Development and to meet the established **development schedule which shall be established jointly with CGS / CGS Online**. In the event of any conflicts between the CGS Online Policy Statement and this Agreement, this Agreement shall control. The Developer agrees to seek prior written approval from the College of General Studies for changes to the agreed-upon scope of work or project timeline.

The College of General Studies reserves the right to stop development work at any time without prior notice. In the event that the College of General Studies stops work through no cause or fault of Developer, Developer will be paid on a pro-rata basis according to work completed as determined by the Associate Dean and Senior Director of the College of General Studies. In the event the work stoppage is due to fault of Developer, including incomplete or improper work or failure to meet the established development schedule, no payment will be forthcoming. It is material to this Agreement that Developer adhere to the development schedule.

The College of General Studies agrees to provide the Developer with payment of **[\$xx new 3 cr. / \$xx rev sp / \$xx new 1 cr.]** for development of instructional materials. Payment will be submitted for the next monthly payroll deadline upon review and acceptance of the final course materials by the College of General Studies.

The College of General Studies will offer this course after completion of the materials. The Developer agrees to teach this course during this initial offering and make any required revisions to the course materials based upon this experience. Limited faculty support for revision may be provided upon approval from CGS.

Accepted by:

_____ Developer	_____ Date
_____ College of General Studies	_____ Date
_____ College of General Studies	_____ Date

CGS Online Course Policy Statement

Instructional Materials Development

COURSE NAME: **[Course Title]**
CATALOG NUMBER: **[DEPT #####]**

The policy regarding the development of instructional materials for course offerings through CGS/CGS Online is described below. The term *development* is used to refer to the process of development, initial teaching and first revision of a set of instructional materials. The term *Developer* refers to the assigned faculty member(s) or instructor who has signed the development agreement.

ASSISTANCE TO BE PROVIDED TO DEVELOPER

The Developer will receive payment for the completion of the development of instructional materials in accordance with this statement and the development agreement.

- The mode and form of payment will be consistent with University policies and procedures.
- The range of payments for development will be determined by academic rank.
- Payment within the predetermined ranges depends upon the scope of the development task.
- Payment may vary dependent upon the extent of the design and technical support that is required from CGS/CGS Online and the University Center for Teaching and Learning.
- The Developer will work together with a CGS instructional designer and participate in a faculty development cohort.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEVELOPER

- The Developer is responsible for adhering to **the written development schedule** established jointly with CGS/CGS Online.
- The Developer is responsible for the academic content and proper attribution of the course and the materials contained in the course.
- The Developer is **responsible** for the following:
 - Identify student learning needs;
 - Specify course goals and objectives;
 - Choose appropriate methods, instructional strategies and media;
 - Implement teaching and interactive tools with the assistance of an instructional designer;
 - Import materials into Canvas;
 - Develop procedures and instruments to assess student learning;
 - Edit and proofread all drafts of materials;
 - Collect and analyze formative course evaluation data obtained during first semester;
 - Revise the instructional materials based upon the results of the data;
 - The Developer is responsible for informing the CGS/CGS Online of any published or third-party copyright protected materials to be used during the development process and for securing copyright clearances for on-line use as may be required.
- The Developer is responsible for providing any course content in a digital format.
- The Developer is responsible for final proofreading of all instructional materials.
- The Developer is responsible for teaching the course in the academic term specified in **the written development schedule**. Developer is responsible for coordinating any teaching and course load issues with his or her School/Department.

APPROVAL AND PAYMENT

- The Developer is responsible for submitting the completed course to the Director of Online Learning at CGS in accordance with development schedule. The Director of Online Learning at CGS will be the final approval authority and approval will not be unreasonably withheld. Payment will then be processed to Developer in accordance with Agreement.
- The Developer is required hereunder to provide the initial teaching, and this will be compensated according to University policy. If low enrollment or other reasons beyond the control of Developer force a cancellation of the Course, Developer may be excused from this requirement.
- Developer is required hereunder to provide the first revision. Compensation for that revision is included in the Memorandum of Agreement. Developer should not undertake further revisions and expect compensation, therefore, without the written approval of CGS. Revisions will be checked and approved by the CGS Director of Online Learning, who may elect to use an instructional designer.
- Ownership of derivative works (revisions following the first revision) that are created by third parties will be owned exclusively by CGS and governed by University policy and any subsequent agreements that CGS may choose to enter with third parties.

ROYALTIES AND COPYRIGHTS

Developer

- Developer and the University of Pittsburgh shall jointly hold copyright in all materials developed hereunder. Copyright registration with the U.S. Copyright Office, if desired, is the responsibility of the Developer. If the Developer registers the work, a copy of the certificate of registration indicating the University's joint ownership shall be forwarded to the Office of General Counsel for filing.
- The Developer retains the right to use the materials for instructional purposes in his/her own courses and at any other institution. In this case, a separate written agreement signed by the University of Pittsburgh must be obtained before the Developer may use materials at another institution. Developer may not assign the materials or course to another party without the prior written consent of the University.
- The Developer is responsible for adhering to the guidelines and policies set forth by CGS/CGS Online regarding securing permissions for materials used in the online course.

College of General Studies/CGS Online

- Except as stated in IV, A, above, and IV, C, below, the University of Pittsburgh retains the exclusive right to reproduce, sell, distribute, display, make derivative works of and use the instructional materials developed under the terms of this policy statement for instruction at the University of Pittsburgh.

- CGS/CGS Online retains the right to revise the instructional materials, using a Developer of its choice, for use for instruction at the University of Pittsburgh.
- All royalties on the sale of the materials by parties other than CGS/CGS Online will be 50% to the Developer as outlined in University Policy 11-02-02 which can be found at <http://www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/procedure/11/11-02-02.html>.

Parties other than CGS/CGS Online

- The reproduction and sale of instructional materials by parties other than CGS/CGS Online, for students other than the University of Pittsburgh students, may be performed at the discretion of the Developer with the prior written consent of the University of Pittsburgh.
- Should the Developer enter into a contract with a party other than CGS/CGS Online to publish these instructional materials, that party should be fully informed of this policy statement and any existing agreement.

POLICY ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The University of Pittsburgh, as an educational institution and as an employer, values equality of opportunity, human dignity, and racial/ethnic and cultural diversity.

Accordingly, the University prohibits and will not engage in discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam era. Further, the University will continue to take affirmative steps to support and advance these values consistent with the University's mission. This policy applies to admissions, employment, and access to and treatment in University programs and activities. This is a commitment made by the University and is in accordance with federal, state, and/or local laws and regulations.

I have read the foregoing terms and conditions and intend and agree to be legally bound thereby.

Developer: _____

Date: _____

SECTION 2: CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE AND STEPS/DELIVERABLES

Section 2 provides information related to the CGS online course development timeline and the steps and deliverables of the development process. Included in this section are also the CGS course review forms used by CGS Online Learning and the Instructional design team in the evaluation and approval process of online courses as well as our rubric of criteria and quality standards for online courses. Please refer to these key resources as you work on the concept and development of your course.

Level of Development Prior to the Start of the Course

In keeping with the goal of offering high-quality online courses that are consistent with the quality of the course offerings through the University of Pittsburgh in other formats, it is critical that specific course materials be fully developed and available for students at the time they are required. Normally the entire course should be developed one month prior to its offering. In particular, the department chair and/or dean may require that the course be fully developed prior to its first offering. Only in exceptional cases should a course be approved to be offered if it is not fully developed prior to its first meeting.

Course Development Timeline, Deliverables, and Due Dates

Developing and teaching an online course in either the web asynchronous or hybrid format requires a significant time commitment on the part of the faculty course developer. Many research studies report that effort required to develop and teach online courses is equivalent to developing and teaching the same course in a face-to-face modality.

The CGS online course development process is estimated to take a minimum of one full term, starting with a written proposal and signed authorization forms. The *Course Development Timeline* below provides a basic overview of the stages of development and the length for each development stage.

Deadlines for the project milestones will differ depending on the term in which you plan to offer the course and are, therefore, determined in consultation with the CGS Director of Online Learning and/or your instructional designer.

Types of Deliverables include but are not limited to

- Course syllabus:
 - should include course purpose and educational outcomes, textbook(s), class requirements, assignments, grade distribution, courses policies, and calendar.
- Course blueprint template:
- Overall framework for content delivery & basic components of course unit

CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE AND DELIVERABLES

Month/Date

Proposal and Approval Stage/ Consultations		<p>Initial meeting with CGS Director of Online Learning to discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your vision for the course and a plan of instruction. Additional available resources and assistance.
		<p>Meet with a CGS Instructional Designer to discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course syllabus, goals, and objectives. What successful learning will look like. Online ways/tools for students to demonstrate their learning.
		<p><i>Once the proposal is approved and the contract signed, cohort meeting dates and a timeline for midpoint and final review are established.</i></p>
Planning and Design		<p>In this phase, CGS will (1) announce the cohort;(2) add your course to the schedule as a CGS online section (tentative); (3) get you a course shell to build your course in, and (4) add the instructional designer to the course shell. Course developers work as a cohort with an instructional designer to create:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliverable 1 – Syllabus for your online course (See CGS Online Syllabus Checklist) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course purpose and educational outcomes. Instructional strategies, incl. student activities, assignments & assessment. Course policies and calendar. Deliverable 2 – Organizational map of content (See CGS Course Blueprint template in Guide) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall framework for content delivery & basic components of course units.
Development and Implementation		<p>In this phase, course developer will continue to work with instructional designer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare content for web format. Begin building course structure and uploading materials in Canvas. Prepare the following elements in Canvas for MIDPOINT PEER REVIEW BY CGS DIRECTOR OF ONLINE LEARNING AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome message, syllabus page and course calendar, course overview unit "Start Here," 1st content unit/module, and all related discussion board assignments and student project materials. CAUTION: If the agreed upon deadline for the midpoint peer review is not met, CGS may terminate development and cancel the course.
Review and Evaluation		<p>In this phase, course developer will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue building course, locating relevant materials and links, uploading content. Test the course within the LMS to determine completion and readiness for review. Submit completed course for review by CGS Director of Online Learning and ID within the LMS using established Quality Matters rubric and CGS standards of development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty member is notified of the review's outcome within two weeks of the due date. If needed, requested changes/edits are made. Once these have all been reviewed and accepted, CGS considers the course "complete."
Teaching the Course		<p>First offering of online course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach the course. Your ID and CGS Director of Online Learning will be enrolled and provide ongoing support culminating in a final one-on-one meeting. Submit a final report to CGS Director of Online Learning upon course completion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What went well? What feedback was received? Which parts of the course received any criticism? What (if anything) would you change for the next run of the course.

CGS ONLINE COURSE FINAL REVIEW AND APPROVAL FORM

This form is to be used with the CGS Online Course Development Rubric.

Course (Dept/Title/Name)	
Developer:	Date:

Review Standard I – Course Overview and Introduction	
<p>The course includes navigational instruction, course and faculty introduction statements, student introductions, clearly stated netiquette expectations and clearly stated requirements for technology/student skills/prerequisite knowledge.</p>	<p>Does this course include each of these components?</p> <p>Yes_____ No_____ N/A_____</p> <p>Comments:</p>
Review Standard II – Learning Objectives	
<p>Clearly stated and understandable course learning objectives address mastery, critical thinking skills, and learning skills in measurable outcomes.</p>	<p>Does this course include each of these components?</p> <p>Yes_____ No_____ N/A_____</p> <p>Comments:</p>
Review Standard III – Assessment and Measurement	
<p>Easily understandable assessments provide feedback and measure learning objectives consistent with course activities, resources, and the learning environment.</p>	<p>Does this course include each of these components?</p> <p>Yes_____ No_____ N/A_____</p> <p>Comments:</p>
Review Standard IV – Resources and Material	
<p>Instructional materials support learning objectives and are consistent in organization with clear purpose, appropriateness and accurately cited.</p>	<p>Does this course include each of these components?</p> <p>Yes_____ No_____ N/A_____</p> <p>Comments:</p>
Review Standard V – Learner Interaction	
<p>Learning activities promote achievement of learning objectives, and articulate and foster interaction. Course design sets instructor availability and prompts engagement with students.</p>	<p>Does this course include each of these components?</p> <p>Yes_____ No_____ N/A_____</p> <p>Comments:</p>

Review Standard VI – Course Technology	
Tools and media support objectives, enhance interaction, are easily downloadable and compatible with delivery modes, and take advantage of existing economies of delivery.	Does this course include each of these components? Yes _____ No _____ N/A _____ Comments:
Review Standard VII – Learner Support	
Clear instructions give a clear description of technical support, academic and student support, and link to related resources and tutorials.	Does this course include each of these components? Yes _____ No _____ N/A _____ Comments:
Review Standard VIII - Accessibility	
The course acknowledges the importance of ADA requirements and provides alternatives for auditory/visual content, meaningful link descriptions, and sensitivity to readability issues.	Does this course include each of these components? Yes _____ No _____ N/A _____ Comments:

<p>Instructional Designer Review Notes:</p> <p>Course was</p> <p>_____ complete _____ incomplete: to be complete before term begins</p> <p>_____ incomplete: to be complete before add/drop ends</p> <p>Reviewed by: _____ Review date: _____</p>

<p>CGS Approvals:</p> <p>Course is</p> <p>___ approved as is ___ approved with changes (attach notes)</p> <p>___ not approved ___ terminate development</p> <p>CGS Evaluator: _____ Date evaluation completed: _____</p>

CGS ONLINE COURSE MIDPOINT REVIEW FORM

Course: _____ Developer: _____ Date: _____

This form will be used with the CGS development rubric (pg. 21) for the evaluation of the following set of deliverables:

Deliverables: Welcome message, syllabus page and schedule, instructor introduction, course overview unit “Start Here,” 1st content unit/module, and module one related activities and assignments (discussion board, homework, quizzes, etc.).

I. Course Overview and Introduction

Review Standard I.1	Yes	No	Notes
Navigational instructions make the organization of the course easy to understand.			
Review Standard I.2	Yes	No	Notes
A statement introduces the student to the course and structure of the learning.			
Review Standard I.3	Yes	No	Notes
Clearly stated netiquette expectations with regard to discussion, email, and chat room communications.			
Review Standard I.4	Yes	No	Notes
The introduction of the faculty is appropriate.			
Review Standard I.5	Yes	No	Notes
Students are required to introduce themselves to the Class.			
Review Standard I.6	Yes	No	Notes
Clearly stated technology requirements, minimum student skills, and any prerequisite knowledge in the discipline.			

II. Learning Objectives

Review Standard II.1	Yes	No	Notes
The course learning objectives describe outcomes that are measurable.			
Review Standard II.2	Yes	No	Notes
The learning objectives address content mastery, critical thinking skills, and core learning skills.			
Review Standard II.3	Yes	No	Notes
The learning objectives are clearly stated and Understandable.			
Review Standard II.4	Yes	No	Notes
Instructions to students on how to meet the learning objectives are adequate and easy to understand.			
Review Standard II.5	Yes	No	Notes
Select learning objectives are articulated and specified on the module/unit level.			

III. Assessment and Measurement

Review Standard III.1	Yes	No	Notes
The assessments measure learning objectives and are consistent with course activities and resources.			
Review Standard III.2	Yes	No	Notes
The grading policy is transparent and easy to understand.			
Review Standard III.3	Yes	No	Notes
Assessment and measurement strategies provide student feedback.			
Review Standard III.4	Yes	No	Notes
The types of assessment selected and the methods used for submission are appropriate for the online learning environment.			
Review Standard III.5	Yes	No	Notes
“Self-check” or practice assignments are provided for quick student feedback.			

IV. Resources and Materials

Review Standard IV.1	Yes	No	Notes
The instructional materials support the stated learning objectives and have sufficient breadth and depth for subject learning.			
Review Standard IV.2	Yes	No	Notes
Instructional materials are presented in a format appropriate to the online environment and are accessible and usable for students.			
Review Standard IV.3	Yes	No	Notes
The purpose of the course elements is evident (content, instructional methods, technologies, and course material).			
Review Standard IV.4	Yes	No	Notes
The instructional materials including supporting materials, are consistent in organization.			
Review Standard IV.5	Yes	No	Notes
All resources and materials used are appropriately cited.			

V. Learner Interaction

Review Standard V.1	Yes	No	Notes
The learning activities promote the achievement of stated objectives and learning outcomes.			
Review Standard V.2	Yes	No	Notes
Learning activities foster instructor-student, content-student, and student-student interaction.			
Review Standard V.3	Yes	No	Notes
Clear standards are set for instructor response and availability.			
Review Standard V.4	Yes	No	Notes
Requirements for course interaction are clearly articulated.			
Review Standard V.5	Yes	No	Notes
The course design prompts the instructor to be present, active, and engaged with the students.			

VI. Course Technology

Review Standard VI.1	Yes	No	Notes
Tools and media support learning objectives and are integrated with all the assignments.			
Review Standard VI.2	Yes	No	Notes
The tools and media enhance student interactivity and guide the student to become a more active learner.			
Review Standard VI.3	Yes	No	Notes
Technologies for this course are either provided or easily downloadable.			
Review Standard VI.4	Yes	No	Notes
Tools and media are compatible with standards of delivery modes.			
Review Standard VI.5	Yes	No	Notes
Instructions on how to access resources at a distance are sufficient and easy to understand.			
Review Standard VI.6	Yes	No	Notes
Course technologies take advantage of existing economies and efficiency of delivery.			

VII. Learner Support

Review Standard VII.1	Yes	No	Notes
Course instructions link to a clear description of the technical support offered.			
Review Standard VII.2	Yes	No	Notes
Course instructions link to an explanation of Pitt's academic and student support system and assist the student in effectively using their resources.			
Review Standard VII.3	Yes	No	Notes
Course instructions link to tutorials and resources that answer questions related to research, technology, etc.			

VIII. Accessibility

Review Standard VIII.1	Yes	No	Notes
The course acknowledges the importance of ADA requirements.			
Review Standard VIII.2	Yes	No	Notes
Web pages provide equivalent alternatives to auditory/visual content.			
Review Standard VIII.3	Yes	No	Notes
Web pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful.			
Review Standard VIII.4	Yes	No	Notes
The course demonstrates sensitivity to readability issues.			

CGS ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT RUBRIC

I. Course Overview and Introduction

<i>Review Standard I.1</i>
Navigational instructions make the organization of the course easy to understand.
Instructions provide a general course overview, guide the new student to explore the course website, and indicate what to do first. Instructors may choose to incorporate some of this information in the course syllabus. If so, students should be directed to this item at the beginning of the course. Other ways to make course navigation easy to follow might be the use of a course tour, clear statements for getting started, a "Start here" module, or an assignment like a discussion board activity or a syllabus quiz to encourage course explanation.
<i>Review Standard I.2</i>
A statement that introduces the student to the course and structure of learning.
The learning process is structured to include the schedule, communication modes, types of activities, and assessment. These are often found in the course syllabus and should include the course schedule, course sequencing, the variety of activities, calendar of assignments and due dates, preferred mode for communication, procedures for exam taking and assignment submissions. For a detailed outline, see "CGS Syllabus Checklist" (Appendix).
<i>Review Standard I.3</i>
Netiquette expectations regarding discussion, email, and chat room communications are clearly stated.
Expectations for student conduct in the online environment must be outlined clearly. Some items to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rules of conduct for participating in discussion boards or chat rooms;• Rules of conduct for email exchange;• "Speaking style" requirements – no net acronyms;• Defined spelling and grammar expectations.
<i>Review Standard I.4</i>
The introduction of the faculty is appropriate.
The initial introduction creates a sense of connection between the instructor and the students. It should present the instructor as professional as well as approachable, and include more than basic essentials, such as information about your teaching philosophy, past experience with teaching online, hobbies, and a photograph. Instructors may elect to create a short introductory video in place of the more traditional text – picture format.
<i>Review Standard I.5</i>
Students are required to introduce themselves to the class
The student introduction helps create a supportive learning environment and a sense of community. Students are asked to introduce themselves and given guidance on where and how they should do so. Instructors might ask students to answer specific questions (such as why they are taking the course, what they expect to learn, etc.) or may choose to let the students decide. Instructors may provide an example of an introduction and/or start the process by introducing themselves. See standard 1.4. above.
<i>Review Standard I.6</i>
Clearly stated technology requirements, minimum student skills, and any prerequisite knowledge in the discipline.
Sufficient technology and Internet access is required for online courses. You may want to consider listing hardware requirements (microphone, speakers, or headset); operating system and software requirements (Office 365, Chrome, Firefox, virus protection or familiarity with firewall, pop-up blocker, or anti-spam software, etc), as well as any other information that is pertinent to your course.

II. Learning Objectives

Review Standard II.1

The learning objectives of the course describe outcomes that are measurable.

Measurable learning objectives ensure instructions precisely describe what students are to gain from instructions, and then guide instructors to accurately assess student accomplishment. All objectives describe student performance in specific, observable terms.

Examples of measurable objectives:

- Select appropriate tax strategies for different financial and personal situations.
- Develop a comprehensive, individualized wellness action program focused on the sedentary lifestyle.

Recommended resources: [Bloom's Taxonomy](#); [Learning Objective Online Generator](#)

Review Standard II.2

The learning objectives address content mastery, critical thinking skills, and core learning skills.

Examine the learning objectives (course and unit level) as a whole for all three types of skills. Every single objective may not contain all three components. Content mastery should be appropriate for the type and level of the course.

Critical thinking skills may include the ability to:

- Distinguish between fact and opinion;
- Distinguish between primary and the secondary sources;
- Identify bias and stereotypes;
- Evaluate information sources for point of view, accuracy, usefulness, etc.;
- Recognize deceptive arguments.

Core learning skills may include:

- Written and oral communication skills;
- Manipulation/organization of information in various ways or using different tools;
- Understanding what one knows and how one knows it, and also does not know and what one needs to find out.

Review Standard II.3

The learning objectives are clearly stated and understandable to the student.

Students can easily grasp the meaning of learning objectives. Use of jargon, confusing terms, unnecessarily complex language, and puzzling syntax are avoided.

Review Standard II.4

Instructions to students on how to meet the learning objectives are adequate and easy to understand.

Clear and complete instructions may take various forms (i.e. narratives, bulleted lists, charts) and may appear at different levels within the course (e.g., under weekly modules).

Review Standard II.5

The learning objectives of the course are articulated and specified on the module/unit level.

Module or unit level objectives may be written by the instructor or come from the textbook. If no such objectives are found, the instructor must gather more information.

III. Assessment and Measurement

Review Standard III.1

The assessments measure learning objectives and are consistent with course activities and resources.

Assessments, learning objectives, and learning activities align in a clear and direct way. The assessment formats must provide a reasonable way to measure the stated learning objectives. Make sure to include all the objectives appropriate to the course.

Examples of inconsistency:

- The objective is to be able to “write a persuasive essay” but the assessment is a multiple choice test.
- The objective is to “demonstrate discipline-specific information literacy” and the assessment is a rubric-scored term paper, but students are not given any practice with information literacy skills on smaller assignments.

Examples of objective alignment:

- A problem analysis evaluates critical thinking skills.
- Multiple choice quiz tests vocabulary knowledge.
- A composition assesses writing skills.

Review Standard III.2

The grading policy is transparent and easy to understand.

Review the clarity of presentation to the student, not the simplicity or complexity of a given reading itself. A relatively complex grading system can still be unambiguous and easy to understand. For example, a list of activities, tests, etc. that will affect the students’ grade is included at the beginning of the course.

You should include your policy on late submissions as well as your grading scale.

Review Standard III.3

Assessment and measurement strategies provide feedback to the student.

Students learn more effectively if they receive frequent, meaningful, and rapid feedback. This feedback may come from the instructor directly, from assignments and assessments that have feedback built into them, or from other students.

Examples:

- Instructor participation in a discussion assignment.
- Writing assignments that require submission of a draft for instructor comment and suggestion for improvement.
- Self-mastery tests and quizzes that include informative feedback with every answer choice.
- Interactive games and group work that have built-in feedback.

Review Standard III.4

The types of assessments selected and the methods used for submitting assessments are appropriate for the online learning environment.

Assessments make use of the technologies and security found in an online classroom.

Examples that meet the standards:

- Submission of text or media files via Turnitin.
- Exams given in a proctored testing center.

- Quizzes with time limitations and other security measures.
- Multiple and authentic assignments which enable instructors to familiarize themselves with each student's work and give a true indication of the learning objectives being met.

Examples that do not meet the standards:

- Required assessment that cannot be submitted online, such a lab practicum in a science course.
- A course in which the entire set of assessments consists in 5 multiple-choice tests taken online, with no enforcement time limit, the print function enabled, and minimum security features in place.

Review Standard III.5

'Self-check" or practice assignments are provided for quick student feedback.

Students have opportunities to measure their own learning progress. Use "self-check" quizzes and activities, as well as other types of practice opportunities that provide rapid feedback.

Such assignments should be voluntary or allow for multiple attempts, for example practice quizzes, games, practice written assignments, and peer reviews.

IV. Resources and Materials

Review Standard IV.1

The instructional materials support the stated learning objectives and have sufficient breadth and depth for subject learning.

Instructions should provide meaningful content in a variety of ways, including the textbook, PowerPoint presentations, websites, lecture notes, outlines, and multimedia.

Review Standard IV.2

Instructional materials represented in a format appropriate to the online environment. These materials are accessible and usable for students.

Students with required technical equipment and software can view the materials online. If some of the course resources, including textbooks, videos, etc., are unavailable within the course website, determine how students would access and easily use them.

Examples:

- Textbooks and/or OER, if used, include titles, authors, publishers, ISBN numbers, copyright dates, and information as to where copies can be obtained.
- A navigation button is devoted to "Resources" and appropriately tied in with the overall course design.
- Required software plug-ins are listed, along with instructions for obtaining and installing these plug-ins.

Some visual format problems could include:

- Text size might be too inconsistent for typical View/Test size setting.
- Large text files are presented without table of contents or unit numbering.
- Multimedia files require plug-ins students do not have.
- Science lab courses may include learning activities that are not easy to format for online reading.

<i>Review Standard IV.3</i>
The purpose of the course elements is evident (content, instructional methods, technologies, and course materials).
<p>Students can easily determine the purpose of all materials, technologies, and methods used in the course and whether materials are required or recommended. For example, a course may be full of external links to Internet resources, but it is unclear if they are for background information, personal enrichment, or required for an assignment</p> <p>Examples of good course elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to external websites indicate the purpose of the links or are self-evident. • The functions of exercises are clearly explained or are completely self-evident.
<i>Review Standard IV.4</i>
The instructional materials, including supporting materials, are consistent in organization.
<p>Online courses should use multiple types of instructional materials appropriate for the level of the course and students must easily understand how they relate to each other. For example, a course requires students to use: a textbook divided into chapters, video segments ordered by topics, a website organized around specific skills, and a tutorial website with an opening menu of “practice quizzes,” “images,” and “audio examples.” Such diversely formatted materials must be integrated well enough to be useful to the uninitiated student.</p>
<i>Review Standard IV.5</i>
All sources and materials used are appropriately cited.
<p>Materials created by the instructor and those borrowed from other sources should be distinctly identified. Text, images, graphic materials, tables, videos, audios, websites, and other forms of multimedia are appropriately referenced according to the University of Pittsburgh’s copyright and intellectual property policy.</p>

V. Learner Interaction

<i>Review Standard V.1</i>
The learning activities promote the achievement of stated objectives and learning outcomes.
<p>Learning activities are various and include class discussions, case studies, practice quizzes, tests, group work, etc. and align with and support the learning objectives. Most of the objectives can be reasonably achieved by students completing the learning activities.</p> <p>Examples of <i>mismatches</i> between activities and objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objective requires students to be able to deliver a persuasive speech, but the activities in the course do not include practice of that skill. • The objective is “Prepare each budget within a master budget and explain the importance in the overall budgeting process.” Students review information about this in texts, observe budgets by the instructor, and produce only one budget.
<i>Review Standard V.2</i>
Learning activities foster instructor-student, content-student, and student-student interaction.
<p>All online courses should include interaction between the instructor and the students and between the students and the content.</p> <p>The degree and type of student-to-student interaction may vary with discipline and the level of the course.</p>

<p>Examples of learning activities (blogs, wikis, discussion boards, etc.) that foster the following types of interaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Instructor-student</i>: Self-introduction; discussion postings and responses; feedback on project assignments; evidence of one-to-one e-mail communication, chat, virtual classroom, etc. • <i>Student-content</i>: Essays, terms papers, presentations, group projects, etc. based on readings, videos, and other content; self-assessment exercises; group work products, etc. • <i>Student-student</i>: Self-introduction exercise; group discussion postings; collaborative group projects; peer critiques, blogs, wikis, student home page etc.
<i>Review Standard V.3</i>
Clear standards are set for instructor response and availability.
Information clearly indicates instructor response time for key events and interactions, including e-mail response time, when feedback will be provided, time required for grade postings, discussion postings, etc. Standards also include instructor availability (office hours) via other media (phone, in person, Zoom, Canvas Conference, Microsoft Teams), as determined by the faculty.
<i>Review Standard V.4</i>
The requirements for course interaction are clearly articulated.
A clear statement of requirements should indicate the criteria for interaction. For example, students required to participate in discussions are told how many times each week they must post original comments, responses to other's comments, what the quality of the comments must be. How comments will be evaluated, what grade credit they can expect for levels of performance, and whether the interaction is required or optional.
<i>Review Standard V.5</i>
The course design prompts the instructor to be present, active, and engaged.
<p>Students know that the instructor is approachable and will regularly interact with them. Opportunities for interaction will vary with the discipline of the course.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An actively used and well-organized instructor-facilitated discussion board. • Optional "electronic office hours" provided in the chat room or chat sessions on selected topics, archived/edited and posted as an FAQ for other students. • An invitation for the class to email the instructor with individual concerns. • Current and regular/ weekly announcements, either in the online classroom or via email.

VI. Course Technology

<i>Review Standard VI.1</i>
The tools and media support the course learning objectives and are integrated with texts and lesson assignments.
Tools and media used in the course support related learning objectives and are integrated with texts and lesson assignments. Students know how the tools and media support the assignments and learning objectives.
<i>Review Standard VI.2</i>
The tools and media enhance student interactivity and guide the student to become a more active learner.
Tools and media used in the course help students actively engage in the learning process, rather than passively "absorbing" information.

<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automated “self-check” exercises requiring student response. • Animations, videos, and games that require student input. • Software that tracks student interaction and progress. • Use of discussion tools with automated notification or ‘read/unread’ tracking.
<i>Review Standard VI.3</i>
Technologies for this course are either provided or easily downloadable.
<p>The term “technologies” may cover a range of plug-ins, such as Acrobat Reader, media players, etc. and courses may require special software packages for math calculators, spreadsheets, etc. clear instructions tell students how to obtain needed packages.</p> <p>Recommended: https://www.technology.pitt.edu/software/student</p>
<i>Review Standard VI.4</i>
Tools and media are compatible with standards of delivery modes.
<p>Course tools, media, and delivery modes meet current standards for widespread accessibility. For example, if most students use streaming media, such a mode is acceptable. If students do not have access to this technology, it should not be used.</p>
<i>Review Standard VI.5</i>
Clearly stated instructions on how to access resources at a distance are sufficient and easy to understand.
<p>Students are aware and able to obtain remote access to learning resources; information on these resources must be visible with clear instructions for accessing them.</p> <p>Example: An explanation of how to obtain full text journal is provided in the assignment that requires their use.</p>
<i>Review Standard VI.6</i>
Technologies take advantage of existing economies and efficiencies of delivery.
<p>New innovative technologies appear all the time and online course technology should be current. Courses not recently developed may need to be updated. For example, using compressed files to reduce file downloading time or delivering audio files in a common file type, such as Windows Media or RealPlayer. Use of Pitt’s lecture-capture and video-streaming platform: Panopto.</p>

VII. Learner Support

<i>Review Standard VII.1</i>
Course instructions link to a clear description of the technical support offered.
<p>Students should have access to technical support including information about how long to log in, use the software, upload files, etc. and does not include help with course content, assignments, or support services. For example, provide a clear description of the services, including a link to a technical support website email and a phone number for a helpdesk.</p>
<i>Review Standard VII.2</i>
Course instructions link to an explanation of Pitt’s academic and student support system and assist the student in effectively using the resources.
<i>Review Standard VII.3</i>
Course instructions link to tutorials and resources that answer questions related to research, writing, technology, etc.
<p>Students should have access to such support services from within the course with a clear description of the tutorials available and how to get them. For example, course directs students to review the Online Student Toolkit available through the Teaching Center.</p>

VIII. Accessibility

<i>Review Standard VIII.1</i>
The course acknowledges the importance of ADA requirements.
All online courses should direct students about how to access Pitt's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) services on campus. The course must have both a statement that tells students how to access these services and be on approved Course management System (Canvas). Consult with the University Center for Teaching and Learning (The Teaching Center) about providing an appropriate ADA statement.
<i>Review Standard VIII.2</i>
Web pages provide equivalent alternatives to auditory/visual content.
Alternative means of access to course information are provided for the vision or hearing-impaired student, such as equivalent textual representations of images, audio, animations, and video in the course website. Presenting information in text format is generally acceptable with screen reader software to read text.
<i>Review Standard VIII.3</i>
Web pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful.
Instructors provide links to Internet content with useful descriptions of what students will find at those sites, enabling the student to use screen reader software to understand links. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All file names and web hyperlinks have meaningful names. For instance, the link to take a quiz should say "Take Quiz 1" not "Click Here."• Icons used as links should also have HTML tags or an accompanying text link.
<i>Review Standard VIII.4</i>
The course demonstrates sensitivity to readability issues
The course uses font, color, and spacing to aid readability and minimize distractions. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formatting such as bold or italics in addition to color coding text.• Web page provided in an alternate, non-color-coded format.• Formatting and color coding are used to communicate key points, group terms, show relevant relationships, etc.

SECTION 3: EXPECTATIONS FOR CGS ONLINE INSTRUCTORS

CGS-affiliated instructors are expected to familiarize themselves with the policies, procedures, and expectations for teaching, contained within the CGS Online Faculty Guide, the CGS Instructor Handbook, and on the [CGS Faculty Resources website](#), and to use this knowledge in their teaching and handling of situations as they arise.

PART I: TEACHING AT CGS - BEST PRACTICES IN ONLINE TEACHING

Class Preparation

Prepare/update the course shell in the LMS for each course taught and make sure it is available to students on the first day of term.

Note to instructors taking over an existing course:

Several months prior to the term in which you will be teaching your newly assigned CGS section, you will be automatically assigned a new course shell via PeopleSoft when the University Center for Teaching and Learning creates the shells. We recommend you subscribe to their newsletter where they announce course shell availability (<http://www.teaching.pitt.edu>).

CGS Academic Affairs staff and a teaching and learning consultant will be in the course as TAs so we may assist you and students and to make sure that the course has been made available to students on the first day of the term as required.

Our expectation is that you prepare the shell for the new term according to the expectations outlined in this document.

- Ensure that your online course(s) meet(s) CGS-established standards for online delivery and interactivity.
- Syllabus - should be as complete and up to date as possible and include all criteria listed in the CGS Syllabus Checklist (See CGS Online Guide).
- Update deadlines so they are appropriate for the term in question.
- Update faculty information so it describes you, your contact information, and office hours.

Note: It is important in a web-based course to include even more detail in the syllabus than you would provide for a face-to-face course, as well as an explanation of your Canvas site, how students should get started, the process for submitting assignments, and other items that need to be detailed for students operating in such an environment.

Welcome page - If your shell does not have a dedicated welcome page (in addition to the announcements page), and you would like to create one, please do! A dedicated welcome page can and should have something to spark interest: pictures, buttons, or fonts, etc.

Internal & External Student Support Resources

- Provide students with a list of external and internal resources (e.g., tutoring services available at CGS and Pitt) to assist students with written communication skills, tech issues, etc.
- All material and assignments for the first week should be posted by the first day of the term. A good practice is to have most of the course material posted by the beginning of the term and pick and choose what students will have access to at this point.
- If this is an existing course, you may need to change any “timed announcements”: some announcements or modules may be set up to appear automatically at a certain date. You will need to update these settings

Course Design and Activities

- All assignments and activities should begin with your learning objectives in mind and provide multiple opportunities for practice to reach stated goals.
- Use a variety of learning approaches that facilitate student-to-student interaction and collaboration, such as discussion boards, chat sessions, and group work. Students should have opportunities to interact with one another on a weekly basis.
- Encourage students to move beyond required texts through use of internet and library resources, as well as expert knowledge.
- Carefully plan and monitor pace, sequence, and scope of all content and activities in the online classroom.
- Provide input about the appropriate use and purpose of all course content.
- Reinforce or clarify the purpose of the learning activities.
- Adult learning principles, active learning, and critical thinking should guide course design and activities.
- Provide places within the online environment for casual exchange, social discussion, and for students to direct questions. This will allow for student-to-student interaction and further discussion opportunities.

Note to instructors taking over an existing online course:

- You are welcome and encouraged to add your own authored videos (welcome video or audio message), tutorials, optional self-study tools such as no-credit quizzes or optional/supplemental readings.
- You would need to notify the CGS Director of Online Learning via email/in writing, if you decide to:
 - change required readings, module structure; format of instructor lectures, or notes; number of exams and other assessment activities;
 - eliminate discussion board assignments or replace them with journals, other types of instructor-to-student homework, or group assignments like blog or wiki;
 - eliminate required face-to-face / synchronous meetings or workshops that are listed in PeopleSoft.
 - add required face-to-face / synchronous meetings or workshops to the ones listed in PeopleSoft.

NB: Your notification should include: 1) the reason for making the suggested change, and 2) an explanation of how the suggested change enhances, complements, improves, and aligns with course content, objectives, goals, and student learning.

During the Course:

- Make it clear to the students how to contact you best and when, either by e-mail or phone. As an example for students, you should respond to all inquiries within 48 hours.
- Facilitate discussions without dominating the thread and encourage interaction among your students.
- Utilize the grading rubrics provided within the LMS (if no custom grading rubrics are used) for the specific course and assignment.
- Provide regular feedback on each student's progress in class; make use of the grade center.
- Set clear expectations for all assignments by giving useful and meaningful feedback on the first major assignment. Continue this practice for all assignments that follow.
- All feedback should provide opportunities for improvement and learning while also validating effort and understanding.
- Provide clear expectations for all grading and use multiple forms of assessment, rather than considering only a few graded assignments. A good practice is to use activities such as discussions or small group work to evaluate student learning.
- Require students to submit assignments only through the LMS portals. If a student cannot submit an assignment via the LMS and submits it by email instead, faculty will attach the student's submission to the gradebook when assigning a grade.
- Grade all course assessment activities within forty-eight (48) hours of the completion due date, being cognizant that earlier grading and the associated feedback is always in the best interest of the student. For missing assignments, faculty will post a grade of "0" within forty-eight (48) hours. The grade can be changed at a later time.
- Remind and encourage your students to complete the OMET teaching survey when it becomes available on their Canvas page during the last weeks of the semester.

It is important in a web-based course to:

- Monitor student progress and proactively engage students including during times of disruption through flexibility and responsiveness to student needs, revising due dates and submission modality as needed. Explain the purpose of changes you make to your students.
- For any concerns regarding student progress, quality of work, lack of responsiveness to email alerts or participation in activities, contact CGS Academic Affairs for assistance.
- Regularly post announcements and course materials and send out e-mail reminders so that students may plan to complete all coursework.
- Use discussion boards in your course to prompt discussion by posting stimulating, open-ended questions with no single correct answers along with guidelines for both replying to the prompt and replying to other students' posts.
- Introduce additional supplemental readings or other resources that are germane to the discussion.
- Establish a presence in the online classroom and create a shared classroom space by using the online environment as the starting point for all student activities, communications, and sources of information.
- Use the Canvas grade book so students are aware of their progress in the course.
- In a web-based classroom, participation must be an important component of a student's grade. Define and communicate for students a clear set of guidelines for participation in the online environment.
- Monitor student adherence to the statement of student responsibilities and submit a referral for any violations in accordance with the academic integrity code listed on the CGS Faculty

Resources page.

- Summarize questions received outside of the LMS (e.g., email) that have general relevance to the class and post the summary – without identifying the source of the question(s) and a response in the Course Q&A Forum.

At the End of the Course:

- Submit final grades according to the University schedule. This is an important step so that students may register for the next term and be eligible to receive financial aid.
- If assigning a G Grade, ensure that the CGS G Grade Faculty Student Contract is completed. Submit a copy of the contract to CGS Academic Affairs at cgsapa@pitt.edu.
- Re-evaluate your teaching practices and consider what could be improved.
- Consider ways to further develop your teaching practices and course materials.
- [Submit a brief Reflection Report online](#) to the CGS Director of Online Learning once the semester is officially over.

PART II: OUTSIDE-THE-CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

- Complete the required CGS Online Demo Course prior to the first term of teaching online at CGS.
- Collaborate with your assigned Teaching and Learning Consultant/Instructional Designer on the revisions / development of your online course.
- Submit all recommended edits, additions and/or deletions for future course content to your Teaching & Learning Consultant for initial review and feedback.
- Observe and follow established standards and timeline for revision/development completion.
- Before the first offering of a new online course, the course must be reviewed and approved by the College of General Studies Academic Programs Director using criteria included in the CGS Online Course Development Rubric.
- Submit technical or content issues with the course to LMS Support at lms@teaching.pitt.edu.
- Attend scheduled programmatic meetings and recommended faculty workshops/webinars, respond to inquiries from your CGS instructional designer and CGS Academic Affairs staff, and contact CGS Director of Online Learning early with any concerns.
- Monitor the monthly CGS Academic Affairs E-bulletin for school-wide and CGS-specific announcements and updates.

Program Administration

To assist, if called upon, with the implementation of the College's academic program assessment plans, which is part of [the University of Pittsburgh's initiative to assess student learning](#). Such assistance typically involves the forwarding of copies of designated students' graded essays/assignments along with prompts and a syllabus, but it may also include occasional service on an assessment panel where such essays/assignments are reviewed.

If randomly selected or at your request: To have CGS Online course(s) reviewed by the CGS Academic Affairs unit as part of the College's ongoing commitment to providing high quality undergraduate educational experiences. For that reason, we strongly encouraged our instructors to take advantage of the personalized services, workshops, and training opportunities offered by the University Center for Teaching and Learning. Services are free of charge to all University instructors, full-time, part-time, adjunct, and TA/TF's. You can learn more about the services and workshops at www.teaching.pitt.edu.

To have course(s) evaluated by students using the evaluation instrument developed by the University Center for Teaching and Learning's Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET). The OMET staff will contact faculty via official University email addresses prior to surveys being opened to students. Complete survey results will be used for administrative purposes, including planning future course revisions. In addition to the reports CGS receives from OMET, you may be asked to provide additional information if needed.

SECTION 4: POLICIES, CHECKLISTS, AND RESOURCES

CGS CREDIT HOUR POLICY FOR ONLINE COURSES

The College of General Studies has established the following curricular guidelines for determining credit hours for online courses developed and offered through CGS. These guidelines are in compliance and consistent with [Federal](#), [Middle States Commission on Higher Education](#), and [University of Pittsburgh policy](#) related to the awarding of academic credit.

One academic credit hour delivered in the traditional face-to-face classroom setting typically consists of 50 minutes of direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student preparation over a 15-week academic semester. The amount of student effort expected for a 1-credit course translates into 750 minutes of class time and 1,800 minutes out-of-class time for a total of 2,550 minutes. A 3-credit hour course must meet 3 academic hours per week (3x50 min) and has 6 hours (6x60 min) of homework. Over a 15-week semester, this is equivalent to 2,250 minutes of seat time and 5,400 minutes of outside work for 7,650 total minutes per term.

Minimum instruction and outside-of-class time are calculated according to this formula:
[(50 + 120) X # of course credits] X # of weeks = total # of minutes for seat time and outside work

The same standard for awarding credit hours applies to courses in the online modality (web, hybrid, or self-paced). In asynchronous learning environments, class time and homework are combined but students are still expected to spend the equivalent amount of time on their online coursework [as compared to the face-to-face course equivalent] each week as per the above guidelines. For example, for an undergraduate 3-credit online course, class time and outside work time should amount to a total of 510 minutes per week.

When designing and developing online courses, instructors must consider the following:

- It is CGS expectation that online courses have student-learning outcomes that are equivalent to those for courses taught in the traditional format and that course objectives and learning outcomes are clearly stated in the course syllabus.
- It is the responsibility of the instructor developing and teaching the course to be able to demonstrate, via class assignments, readings, projects, and class attendance and participation policies, that the expected student activity load is sufficient in scope and rigor for the academic level and credits of the course and reasonably distributed throughout the semester.

Course developers and instructors are asked to estimate the average amount of time students are expected to spend interacting with course content each week and address any inconsistencies, if necessary. Interactions with course content include, but are not limited, to:

- Orientation to the course in Canvas, incl. software, discussion board or blog setups; etc.
- Reading and Viewing

- Online material with no interactivity (PowerPoint slides, syllabus, announcements, online articles, journals, textbooks [online and traditional], assignment instructions, grade rubrics, etc.)
- Online materials with interactivity (tutorials, multimedia)
- Video, audio, podcasts, webinars, or simulations
- Activities with active instructor involvement, such as:
 - Instructor-led online chats, discussion board interactions, or group work;
 - Online office hours
 - Instructor-narrated and recorded lecture slides and videos
- Assignments utilizing Canvas tools:
 - Quizzes, Assignments, Discussions, Conferences
 - Wikis, blogs, journals, simulations, gaming, podcasts

Note: Studying for examinations, homework assignments, preparing presentations, and writing papers are considered outside-of-class work.

Here is a sample sheet for estimating asynchronous contact hours.

Schedule	Interactions with Course Content	Minutes/Hours estimated	Outside Instructional Time	Minutes/Hours estimated	Total Time
Week #1					
Week #2					

Course Syllabus

Faculty are expected to prepare a course syllabus, an at-a-glance calendar, and any relevant course materials for the CGS section(s) they teach. A copy of the course syllabus and course schedule is due to CGS Academic Affairs within the first month of the semester and may be submitted via our [online Course Submission Form](#) or directly emailed to us at cgsapa@pitt.edu.

CGS courses are academically rigorous, and faculty are expected to uphold the same academic standards for CGS courses as they do for any other courses taught for the respective academic department. For more information on how to construct a course, explore the [Teaching Center’s Resources for Teaching section online](#). Refer to the **CGS Syllabus Checklist** below for further details on our expectations for classroom educators and the [Teaching Center’s syllabus checklist](#) for an up-to-date list of suggested syllabus statements (e.g., Accessibility; Copyright Notice; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Email Communication; Gender Inclusive Language; Religious Observances; Classroom Recording, Content Warning & Class Climate, and more).

CGS SYLLABUS CHECKLIST FOR ONLINE COURSES

A syllabus is a contract between the instructor and the students that makes clear the expectations and requirements each party is supposed to fulfill.

BASIC COURSE INFORMATION

- Institution and department / school offering the course
- Subject, Catalog Number, and Title (e.g., GER 1502 *Indo-European Folktales*)
- Term and year offered
- Delivery method (web / asynchronous, hybrid, on-campus)
- Location and time for class meetings for in-person classes (workshops for hybrid classes)

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

- Name
- Office location (if any)
- Phone numbers (may include dept. number)
- Email address(es)
- Office Hours

COURSE DETAILS

- Course description (should include a broad overview of course topic, learning outcomes, and academic requirements fulfilled, as well as any prerequisites)
- Course materials (textbooks, videos, course reserves etc. and information on what is required & how to obtain/access the materials)
- Additional course materials/software/hardware and brief explanation how they will be used

COURSE STRUCTURE

- Using Canvas as the Learning Management System (LMS)
- Description of your Canvas course organization (modules, weeks, or topics)
- Methods of course delivery (e.g., lecture slides, videos, discussions, etc.)
 - In-person or virtual workshops in hybrid courses
- Course calendar and schedule

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

- Course Assignments and percentage value
- Grade scale & standards (incl. extra credit)
 - use of the Canvas Grade Book
- Email and Communication Expectations
- Class Participation and Attendance
 - Use of online discussions / Netiquette
- Assignment Submission and Missed Deadlines
 - exams / use of the Testing Center (if applicable)

POLICIES AND STATEMENTS

- Academic Integrity (required)
- Disability Services (required)
- Classroom Recording
- Copyright Notice
- Accessibility
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- Nonstandard Grades (G Grades)
- Religious Observances
- Turnitin
- Content Warning & Class Climate statement*
- Gender Inclusive Language statemen

*See the [Teaching Center's website](#) for suggested syllabi statements.

CGS COURSE SYLLABUS TEMPLATE

[Course Number and Title]

[Department/school offering the course], [Term], [Year]

Instructor

[Instructor Name]

Phone

[Phone or Department
Phone]

Email

[Email]

Website

[Optional: Website or
LinkedIn profile]

Office Location

[Building, Room, if
available]

Office Hours

[Hours, Days, Method]

COURSE DESCRIPTION

[Paste the official description of the course here and add any additional information specific to the section you teach. For the official catalog description, [search the undergraduate course catalog.](#)]

COURSE PREREQUISITES

[Insert prerequisites or note if N/A]

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

[Insert 3 to 5 specific, measurable statements indicating what students will know or be able to do upon completion of the course. Use [Bloom's taxonomy verbs](#) to indicate the cognitive level of course objectives. Learning objectives should describe observable behaviors. Avoid using verbs like "understand" or "know" as these are not observable.]

- [Learning objective]
- [Learning objective]
- [Learning objective]
- [Learning objective]

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS AND MATERIALS

Include both texts and any technology tools that students may need to purchase:

Course materials: [textbooks, videos, course reserves etc. and information on what is required and how to obtain/access the materials]

Technology Tools: [webcam or smart phone with camera, specific software]

COMMUNICATION, COURSE STRUCTURE, AND PARTICIPATION

This course will take place in the [Canvas learning management system](#). Please use **[insert preferred method of communication]** to get in touch with me. Note the course title, number, and section in the subject line of messages or emails. I will reply to inquiries within **[insert time frame (48 hours recommended)]**.

Course content, which includes lectures, readings, videos, activities, and assessments, is organized in modules by **[week/unit/chapter – indicate module design]**. In order to be successful in this course, I recommend planning to log into the Canvas course shell **[number]** times each week and checking your University of Pittsburgh email **[number]** times each week. Course work should take you approximately **[xx]** hours per week. For information about navigating and using Canvas, refer to the tutorials posted in the course shell and the [Canvas Student Guide](#).

ASSIGNMENTS SUBMISSION AND GRADING

[Revise as needed. You may need to add additional information unique to your course (e.g., your role in online discussions; amount of time students will need to prepare for each assignment; policies for grace periods or extensions, if permitted.)] All assignments are due by **[insert time]** Eastern Standard Time (EST) on the dates listed on the course schedule. All assignments should be submitted electronically through Canvas.

[Insert penalties for submitting late work.] All exams and assignment dates are given on the course schedule. Please mark your calendar accordingly. Make-up exams will be given on a case-by-case basis only in exceptional cases and at the instructor’s discretion. Please be aware that proper documentation must be provided in these instances. Please be aware that make-up exams may differ in both content and format.

If you experience technology difficulties, you are responsible for contacting the [University Help Desk](#) to resolve problems. Technology difficulties or illness without an official medical excuse does not excuse late work.

Assignments

Detailed assignment descriptions and grading tools are posted in the Canvas course shell. *Your course grade will be calculated as follows:*

[Assignment title]	[Percentage value of total]
[Brief assignment description]	
[Assignment title]	[Percentage value of total]
[Brief assignment description]	
[Assignment title]	[Percentage value of total]
[Brief assignment description]	
[Assignment title]	[Percentage value of total]
[Brief assignment description]	

Total:

[100%]

Grade Scale [sample--may vary per school, department, or instructor]

A = 93-100, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72, D+ = 67-69, D = 63-66, D- = 60-62, F < 60

Course Policies

Academic Integrity Policy [Required]

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators. To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the [Academic Integrity Guide](#) for an overview of the topic. For hands-on practice, complete the [Academic Integrity Modules tutorial on Canvas](#). You will be prompted to sign up with your Pitt ID and password.

[Add specific repercussions (like earning a 0 on the exam or assignment or for the course) for failure to adhere to policy. Dietrich School instructors, please see the [Academic Integrity Statement on the DSAS website here.](#)]

Disability Services [Required]

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodation for this course.

Statement on Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Copyright Notice

Course materials may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibit unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials. See [Library of Congress Copyright Office](#) and the [University Copyright Policy](#).

Accessibility

Canvas is ADA Compliant and has fully implemented the final accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Please note that, due to the flexibility provided in this product, it is possible for some material to inadvertently

fall outside of these guidelines.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The University of Pittsburgh does not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status or gender identity or other factors as stated in the University's Title IX policy. The University is committed to taking prompt action to end a hostile environment that interferes with the University's mission. For more information about policies, procedures, and practices, visit the [Civil Rights & Title IX Compliance web page](#).

[Note to instructor: Revise as needed.] I ask that everyone in the class strive to help ensure that other members of this class can learn in a supportive and respectful environment. If there are instances of the aforementioned issues, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, by calling 412-648-7860, or e-mailing titleixcoordinator@pitt.edu. Reports can also be [filed online](#). You may also choose to report this to a faculty/staff member; they are required to communicate this to the University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. If you wish to maintain complete confidentiality, you may also contact the University Counseling Center (412-648-7930).

Nonstandard Grades (G Grade)

The "G" grade is applied only when students who have been attending a course and making regular progress are prevented from completing the course by circumstances beyond their control, such as a major medical emergency. These grades will only be given in very rare, documented circumstances governed by the current University G Grade Policy. Students in CGS Online classes will be asked to complete a G-Grade Contract with their instructor.

Religious Observances

The observance of religious holidays (activities observed by a religious group of which a student is a member) and cultural practices are an important reflection of diversity. As your instructor, I am committed to providing equivalent educational opportunities to students of all belief systems. At the beginning of the semester, you should review the course requirements to identify foreseeable conflicts with assignments, exams, or other required attendance. If at all possible, please contact me (your course coordinator/s) within the first two weeks of the first class meeting to allow time for us to discuss and make fair and reasonable adjustments to the schedule and/or tasks.

Turnitin [Required if using Turnitin]

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the respective reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com page service is subject to the Usage Policy and Privacy Pledge posted on the Turnitin.com site.

COURSE SCHEDULE

See the [University of Pittsburgh Academic Calendar](#) for important dates like the final dates to add and drop or withdraw from courses.

All assignments are due at [insert time] on the dates noted.

The course schedule is subject to change if I determine that changes will improve your learning experience. If I change the course schedule, I will notify you well in advance and post a new copy of the course schedule immediately.

Week/Date	Topics/Activities	Homework Due/Due Dates
1:		Assignment title due on month/date
2:		
3:		
4:		
5:		
6:		
7:		
8:		
9:		
10:		
11:		
12:		
13:		
14:		

DEVELOPING MODULES

Development of an online course involves creating modules. Whatever you are teaching, you must divide the contents of your course into digestible pieces, called modules. This gives your course contents structure, consistency, and form for online presentation and delivery to your students.

Creating the modules involves the following steps:

Step1: Identify and make a list your course modules. This can be done in several ways:

- by content-specific topics
- by chapters of a textbook you are using
- by date or time frame
- by a metaphor
- by steps in a process

Step 2: Sequence your modules

Step 3: Name your modules

Tips: (from Sloan-C)

- The number of modules in your course should not exceed the number of weeks in the semester.
- Start your course with an ice breaker activity.
- End your course with a closing activity. (That activity can help you get feedback from students, which may be useful as you review and revise your course.)
- Consider areas of your course for class community type of activities. e.g., where students can meet each other and talk about non-course related activities.
- Consider private communication with students.
- Consider how and where and when you will make and archive class/course announcements.
- Adopt a clear, logically-organized, and consistent module structure, including well-named documents that indicate the type of activity, due date, or time frame.

What to include in modules?

Introduction/Overview

This section serves as an introduction to the module students are beginning. This is a chance for faculty to explain the focus of the course for that particular time period. It is important to be brief, but clear about what material and information will be covered, establish the time period (one week, two weeks, etc.), and possibly a brief description of the type of activities students should be prepared to complete.

Learning Goals & Objectives

Unlike in the syllabus where the overall goals and objectives for the course were set down, these learning goals and objectives are specific for the module. These include what the students should expect to get out of a particular module.

Expectations

It is recommended that you also give clear and explicit details of your expectations from students for each module.

Lecture Notes

This can be an outline of notes or the actual set of notes that students will need to follow along with the activities, presentations, and discussions associated with this time period of the course.

Focus Questions

This section poses questions related to materials and concepts that are important for the module's topics of discussion. These questions will help organize and focus your readings and participation in interactive activities, such as discussion boards or chat rooms.

Handouts

This is a place to offer links to documents related to the module. These can be required items or handouts meant to supplement the module content and activities. It is advised that these be links so that students can print them or save them to their computer.

Exercises and Other Learning Activities

This section should include a thorough description of the learning activities—what the student will be doing as he/she works through this module. It may include presentations of media for the purpose of explaining, discussing, or elaborating on concepts from the module. This would also be the place to link discussion boards, audio files, video conferencing, and chat room discussions that serve as the means of interaction between students and faculty for this module period and help students meet the objectives associated with this period of time in the course. You may also consider offering quizzes that give opportunities for immediate feedback to the students as far as how much of the material they are understanding and retaining. Do not forget to give comprehensive instructions on how to create, participate, submit, or accomplish every learning activity in a module.

Assignments

This is where faculty would list assignments related to this specific course module. This is a good place to use the assignment function which allows faculty to upload all student assignments turned in at one time rather than track individual files.

Assessments/Evaluations

You should also provide clear and explicit details on how you will evaluate/assess student work and participation through each module.

Related Readings

This section lists the readings students should complete by the end of the module. These may be set up with due dates throughout the time period of the module or they can all be due by the end of the module.

DEVELOPING AND TEACHING YOUR ONLINE COURSE

An online course is NOT simply a traditional face-to-face course replicated on a computer screen.

An online course is still based on course goals and learning outcomes. However, a key difference is that students do not need to rely on face-to-face interaction to learn content. This also means the computer communication and feedback are highly important and should be structured accordingly. **Long lectures are not effective for online course presentation.** A successful online course will reflect the communicative nature of the online environment and incorporate resources from the outside world.

Although studies have shown that the medium of online instruction has not significantly altered learning, the design of the materials on the online medium has great influence. The **basic instructional design steps** are:

- analysis
- design
- development
- implementation
- evaluation

Your instructional designer can help you through all of these steps.

Educators must **first design their curriculum, goals and objectives** and then consider how the online environment can best serve the instructional objectives and activities of that curriculum.

This requires changes in pedagogy, with instructors taking the role of facilitators of information while guiding students toward solutions. In order for online learning to be successful, teachers as well as learners must take on new roles in the teaching-learning relationship, and faculty must be willing to release control of learning to the students.

Online learning environments allow **various interactive methodologies**. By adapting these methodologies to their courses, instructors can pay more attention to the instructional design of their courses. As a result, the quality, quantity, and patterns of communication students practice during learning are improved.

Many instructional strategies used in traditional classrooms can be successfully adapted for facilitating online learning. Instructors should choose strategies that are most effective for accomplishing their educational objective. From this perspective, instructional strategies are tools available to instructors for designing and facilitating learning.

Learning Activities

Online courses require different kinds of learning activities. Below are examples of typical learning activities that can be used in the online learning environment:

Discussion
Chat

Pop-quiz or self-test
Small group work

Project
Lecture
Brainstorming
Debate
Journal keeping
Case study
Review
Simulations

Interview
Research
Critiques
Peer review/reactions
View videos/presentations
Share and summarize

Here are some specific **activities to enhance student learning** (addressing multiple learning styles):

- Video clips of interviews, movements
- Historical audio clips of famous speeches
- Screen animations (“viewlets”) for instructional exercises illustrating software use
- Online journals or personal interview reports
- Students report back with reviews of Web-based resources
- Crossword or word search puzzles
- Matching and game-show-style trivia games
- Online scavenger hunt / WebQuest
- Annotated bibliography
- Guest speakers facilitate student discussions
- Flash simulations

Here are some activities to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills:

- Discussions center on questions without a single correct answer
- Compare and contrast exercises
- Case studies or “real world” scenarios requiring Web-based research
- Role playing
- Critique classmates’ assignments
- Collaborative exercises
- Portfolios (building one activity upon another) to share/peer review
- Agree to disagree to promote higher thinking
- Online presentations (e.g., informational web pages, Web-based student-generated quizzes)

Original Source: <http://www.humboldt.edu/~jdv1/InstructionalDesignTips.pdf>

Tips for Instructors:

Simply publishing a Web page with links to other pages or other digital resources does not constitute online instruction. Materials developed for Web-based instruction must follow established instructional design principles in order to be effective and viable means of education.

Some basic principles of instruction are same for both face-to-face and online courses. Therefore, Robert Gagné's ***Nine Universal Steps of Instruction*** can be helpful in design of learning materials:

- Motivate the learner
- Explain what is to be learned
- Recall previous knowledge
- Present the material to be learned
- Provide guidance for learning
- Active involvement
- Provide feedback
- Test comprehension
- Provide enrichment or remediation

Source: <http://www.ion.uillinois.edu>

The most common suggestions for online teaching comes from Chickering, A. W., and A. F. Gamson's ***Seven Principles of Good Practice in Online Teaching and Learning***:

- The developer/instructor encourages student-faculty contact and interaction.
- The developer/instructor encourages student cooperation and reciprocity.
- The developer/instructor encourages active learning.
- The developer/instructor gives prompt feedback.
- The developer/instructor emphasizes time on task.
- The developer/instructor communicates high expectations.
- The developer/instructor respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Accordingly, to achieve high levels of learning and student satisfaction, you will need to design an online course environment that is:

- learner/learning-centered
- knowledge-centered
- assessment- centered
- community-centered

Source: Chickering, A. W., and A. F. Gamson. *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation, Inc/Wingspread, 1987

There are also some **practical tips** developed particularly for online courses:

Adopt a learner-centered teaching philosophy for online courses. The online learning environment provides more opportunities for learner-control and learner-centered activities.

Design and utilize learning activities that engage students in active learning. Remember that active participation facilitates learning better than passive participation. Learning is a process of actively acquiring, processing information, and making sense of the information.

Instructional materials that have been successful in the classroom may not be successful in an online format. Decide how these might be modified for online us.

- ☑ Content should be sequenced and structured in a manner that enables learners to achieve the stated goals.
- ☑ Information should be “chunked” or grouped to help students learn the content.
- ☑ Provide meaningful and authentic learning experiences that help learners apply course concepts and achieve course objectives.
- ☑ Use strategies that consider the different learning styles of students. Instructional and learning activities should encourage frequent and meaningful interactions among learners and between learners and instructors. Develop strategies and techniques for establishing and maintaining “learning communities.” This will help to overcome the isolation that students could experience when taking an online course.
- ☑ Provide detailed and clear instructions for course assignments and instructor notes.
- ☑ Provide ample opportunities for feedback and methods for assessment.
- ☑ Learn the technology yourself and know where to find support for both you and your students.
- ☑ While selecting appropriate instructional materials, be aware of the online instruction copyright issues and carefully observe all applicable laws.

Source: Florida Gulf Coast University, Online Design

In facilitating online courses, it is also suggested that you follow the below Checklist for Action:

- Do not lecture.
- Be clear about expectations of the participants.
- Be flexible and patient.
- Be responsive.
- Do not overload.
- Monitor and prompt for participation.
- For assignments, set up small groups and assign tasks to them.
- Be a process facilitator.
- Write weaving comments every week or two...
- Organize the interaction.
- Set rules and standards for good netiquette (network etiquette)...
- Establish clear norms for participation and procedures for grading...
- Assign individuals or small groups to play the role of teacher and of moderator for portions of the course.
- Close and purge moribund conferences in stages...
- Adopt a flexible approach toward curriculum integration on global networks.

Source: Chapter 6 of Teaching Online (Harasim et al., 1995)

ONLINE DISCUSSION: STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The discussion method is the most popular teaching technique used in online courses.

Online discussion offers several advantages to face-to-face classroom interactions:

- Reserved or shy students may feel less vulnerable communicating their thoughts online than they would face-to-face in the classroom.
- All students have an equal opportunity to participate in the discussion.
- Students can explore a variety of perspectives shared online as they construct their own understanding of the material. If part of a message is missed or not understood, it can be revisited at any time.
- Responses tend to be more thoughtful and reflective than communications found in chats or even e-mail.
- Discussions can be archived and revisited and printed at a later time.

However, if you want to initiate an online discussion, you have to think, plan, and carefully monitor it so that it becomes successful.

Characteristics of effective discussions:

- **Support course/assignment-learning objectives.** Keying topics to the readings, exercises and assignments for a particular week helps keep students focused on what is important and reinforces concepts that are being learned.
- **Generate interest.** Give students a reason to stay engaged by asking interesting and challenging questions.
- **Facilitate thought, not “just the facts.”** The construction of your questions requires a lot of forethought. Avoid broad topic threads (i.e., What do you think of the Spanish Civil War?) and factual questions for which there is only one answer. Include guided discussion questions, promote critical thinking through Socratic questioning, ask students to compare and contrast, connect to prior knowledge, etc.
- **Can be applied to everyday life or professional goals.** A good and preferred teaching strategy is providing opportunities for application of new information to students’ personal and professional lives. Discussion questions of this character can also allow everyone to demonstrate what he or she knows and let others learn from them.
- **Provide clear, explicit instructions.** Provide students with a list on the type of response, both initial postings and replies, you expect. Provide examples (exemplary responses). Take time to delineate each step of each individual discussion assignment.
- **Receive points and/or graded.** The most effective way to promote student participation is to make it required and graded.
- **Reflect a percentage of the course grade that is appropriate, feasible, and significant.** It is recommended that discussion is between 10 to 40 percent of total grade.
- **Provide a rubric or other evaluation tool that details the evaluation process.** When students know exactly how they will be evaluated they tend to live up to those expectations. Evaluation tools help foster effective discussion by decreasing student anxiety and defensiveness.
- **Require reply to other participants.** Encourage students to interact with each other, not just with you.

- **Include effective facilitation.** Think student-centered discussions! Do you want students to meet your expectations for online participation? They will follow your lead – involve yourself, participate. But don't control the discussion; do not enter too quickly or too often into the discussions. Allow time for students to respond to each other, before commenting. Respond to questions directed to you personally. Redirect discussion only when information is incorrect, or is off-topic. Immediately stop inappropriate or hostile postings.

Source: Tracey Smith. "Discussions: Importance, Design, Facilitation, and Evaluation" *Pointers and Clickers* (November / December 2002).

Strategies for a successful online discussion:

- **Communicate your expectations.** In your syllabus, clearly articulate your expectations and grading criteria for student participation including a required minimum number of weekly student contributions to the discussions. One of the most effective ways to promote student participation is to make it required and graded. Grade both for the quality of the postings as well as the quantity. To be an effective motivator, participation should constitute between 10-40 percent of the student's overall grade.
- **Determine the goals and objectives** of the discussion before you initiate a forum and use them to help keep the discussion on track. If the purpose changes, make that clear to students.
- **Match the discussions to the course content.** Start discussion topics that will help students focus on the course material and share ideas as they process the assignments, readings, projects and exercises. The organization of discussion forums in your classroom should reflect the class structure and scheduled sequence of topics in the syllabus. For example, you might consider creating a discussion forum for each week of your course. This will help your students stay focused and on track.
- **Put the discussion questions and assignments together** in a way that will help students focus on the course material as they process the assignments and share ideas.
- **Require a hand-in assignment.** A requirement, such as a group project or individual paper, will ensure that students integrate, synthesize and apply the information that has been discussed in the discussion forum. It can also boost participation if the discussions are closely tied to the assignment.
- **Start the major topic threads yourself.** Often students need structure to get the discussions off to a good start. It's a good idea for the instructor to start all major topic threads, so students will know where to post and feel comfortable jumping in to the discussion.
- **Formulate focused question(s) or problems** to begin threads. Seek postings that provide unique, rather than repetitive, responses.
- **Facilitate - don't dominate.** It is crucial that you limit your participation to a level you can sustain and that your contributions complement and expand on ideas generated by the participants. Don't try to respond to every posting in the classroom. Try to encourage your students to interact with each other, not only with you. You can do this by tying related messages in a thread together in one posting, and making comments that address several students. Also, you can ask follow up questions that stimulate further discussion and invite students to respond to their classmates' ideas.
- **Limit the time for each discussion forum** you initiate. The period can always be extended if the discussion becomes particularly robust. Be sure participants are aware of the time limits.

- **Decide on a schedule for accessing** a discussion and notify your students of that schedule—e.g., discussion contributions should be in by each evening or by Friday of each week if you expect them to be read that day/week.
- **Establish and communicate general, clear criteria or guidelines** for your online discussion. For example, clearly state what kind of behaviors you want to avoid in the discussions (e.g., personal affronts, overly personal disclosures, or prejudicial statements). Also, clearly communicate the writing styles and guidelines to be used in the discussions.
- **Be prepared to refocus a discussion** that drifts too far from the topic or from productive interchange. You may not be actively participating in the discussion, but you have to step in when a conversation moves too far off track. Carefully consider your wording when you redirect the discussion so as not to discourage contributions.
- **Clearly differentiate threads and responses** by using the subject line effectively. This will enable you and your students to easily locate specific information. If all the subject lines are the same, the forum very quickly becomes confusing and overwhelming.
- **Facilitate student-led discussions.** Student-led discussions encourage active participation. Use student-led discussions to construct and confirm meaning through sustained discourse in a community of inquiry. Use icebreakers to introduce your students to the role of questions in thinking and learning and their role as discussion facilitators. Give detailed instructions on how to compose discussion questions. Also, consider having students take turns monitoring and guiding a discussion thread.
- **Make the activities interesting and relevant to your students' needs.** Give students a reason to become actively involved in a discussion topic by appealing to their life experiences, interests and ambitions. They can use their chosen topics as examples in the class discussions, thus personalizing the course content to their needs or interests.
- **Make your teaching presence felt.** Suggestions for how to facilitate and direct discussions: identify areas of agreement/disagreement, seek to reach consensus/understanding, acknowledge student contributions, assess the efficacy of the process, present content and questions, focus the discussion, confirm understanding, diagnose misperceptions, summarize the discussion, respond to technical concerns, inject knowledge from diverse resources.
- **Give feedback.** Provide plenty of timely, constructive, and quality feedback, and where appropriate, add to a student's answer engaging him/her in more dialogue. When the instructor participates in the discussion, providing critique, encouragement, and feedback, students cannot help but become more involved. For example, thank students publicly for comments contributed to the discussions that show particular insight or depth and encourage participants who have submitted shallow responses to consider a more in-depth contribution by asking for specific details pertaining to their posting, or for an example from their workplace.
- **Create a social atmosphere, which is friendly and enthusiastic.** Model the style and tone you want your students to use in their postings. Use discussion forums to promote collegiality, for introductions and interpersonal communication not related to the content of the course (*Bulletin Board, Gab-fest, Gripe-fest, The Suggestion Box, Antidepressants—jokes*). In addition to weekly forums for discussion on the course materials and topics, provide an initial forum (called the Water-cooler, lounge, pub, cafe, etc.) where students can introduce themselves to you and their classmates. By greeting all students individually in the first week of class in this forum, you can establish a supportive learning community where students feel they are part of a group. This same forum can be used later during the course for students to post messages of interest that may not be directly related to the weekly class discussions. Finally, it is also a good idea to provide a separate forum for students to ask you and each other questions about the course,

- procedures, policies or other issues.
- **Teach discussion netiquette.** Publish a list of protocols or rules for your students to follow. This will help maintain order in the discussion and facilitate clear communication. Keep the atmosphere in your discussion forum respectful and supportive. Harsh words submitted to an online discussion forum will be more hurtful since they will remain there until they are removed. Show your students how you expect them to behave online by setting the tone in your communications with them in the discussion forum.
 - **Be aware of different cultural patterns and communication styles.** Students from some cultures may not relate well to questions requiring volunteered responses. In this case, a question like, “Anyone care to comment on this?” might be changed to “Please post your response to the topic by Wednesday.” Humor is culturally specific and may not be perceived the same by everyone. Be aware that participants will have different learning styles. Some will learn more easily in groups, while others will excel when working independently.
 - **Provide a variety of activity-types allowing for differences in learning styles.** Finally, some students may not feel comfortable sharing personal experiences while others find this process quite natural. You can respect these differences by offering options to your students in the way you frame your questions. For example, “Can you relate this to your own experience or one you have heard or read about?”
 - **Keep in mind that students do not have access to the visual, kinesthetic, and sound cues they are used in a conversation.** If a student sends a question directly to you that could arouse the interest of other students, you may want to use it to begin a new forum (“Questions and Answers”) and share the question and your response with others in the class without revealing the student’s name. This might decrease the number of individual e-mails you receive on the same topic.

Source:

Bill Pelz, “(My) Three Principles of Effective Online Pedagogy,” JALN, Volume 8, Issue 3 (June 2004).